

# **Ageing in digital societies: enablers and barriers to older persons exercising their social rights**

**Italy**

**June 2022**

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# 1 Legal and policy framework

## 1.1 National legislation on digital public administration

The process of digitalisation of the Italian public administration is governed by the Digital Administration Code<sup>1</sup>, a consolidated Act gathering all legislative dispositions relating to the computerisation of the Public Administration in its interaction with the users and private companies. The Code was introduced through the Legislative Decree No. 82 of 7 March 2005<sup>2</sup> and subsequently repeatedly reformed until 2017 (Legislative Decree No. 217 of 13 December 2017<sup>3</sup>), in order to introduce and enforce the rights to digital citizenship.

Art. 8 of the Code specifically concerns computer literacy of all citizens (to be meant as not merely people holding the Italian citizenship, but rather all users of services provided by the Public Administration). According to this disposition, State authorities, each branch of the public administrations and providers of public services must promote initiatives aimed at disseminating a digital culture among Italian citizens, with a specific focus on children and on categories of vulnerable subjects particularly exposed to the risk of being excluded from the digitalisation process. These initiatives are needed also with a view to encouraging the development of legal IT skills and the use of the digital services of public administrations with specific and concrete actions, using a range of different means including radio and television broadcasting. However, the categories of potential vulnerable users are neither specified nor explicitly listed in the Code.

Art. 8-bis of the Code further established that the above-mentioned public bodies must promote, in line with the objectives of the Digital Agenda for Europe, the availability of Internet connectivity in public offices and other public places, in particular in the educational, health and tourism sectors, including by providing that the portion of bandwidth not used by the offices themselves is made available to users.

## 1.2 National policy, strategy or action plan on the digitalisation of public services or digital inclusion

The implementation of the digitalisation of the public administration is organised by the three-year plan for information technology in public administration (*Piano*

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<sup>1</sup> Decreto Legislativo 7 marzo 2005, n. 82, "[Codice dell'Amministrazione Digitale](#)".

<sup>2</sup> Decreto Legislativo 7 marzo 2005, n. 82, "[Codice dell'amministrazione digitale](#)".

<sup>3</sup> Decreto Legislativo 13 dicembre 2017, n. 217, "[Disposizioni integrative e correttive al decreto legislativo 26 agosto 2016, n. 179, concernente modifiche ed integrazioni al Codice dell'amministrazione digitale, di cui al decreto legislativo 7 marzo 2005, n. 82, ai sensi dell'articolo 1 della legge 7 agosto 2015, n. 124, in materia di riorganizzazione delle amministrazioni pubbliche](#)".

*Triennale per l'informatica della Pubblica Amministrazione*). Its first edition covered the period 2020-2022 and it has been recently updated for the period 2021-2023<sup>4</sup>, to take into account the challenges and lessons learnt from the Covid-19 experience, as well as the measures introduced with the National Recovery Plan (described in Section 1.3). The Plan does not specifically refer to inclusion of specific groups – such as older people – in the digitalisation process; it rather generally refers to the necessity to implement an inclusive digitalisation process.

One of the core principles of the Plan is “Ensuring inclusive and accessible services”, meaning that public administrations must design digital public services that are inclusive and meet the diverse needs of people and territories. In the third section of the Plan – concerning the governance of the digitalisation process – a section is envisaged on digital inclusion (Page 55 of the Plan). According to the Plan, the digital divide existing across population groups and territories has a negative impact on the possibility of exercising citizenship rights and informed participation in democratic dialogue; the ability to respond to the demands of the labour market; the ability of the country to adapt to the evolution of new markets and professions, largely related to emerging technologies. With this in view, the Plan mentions the crucial role played by the National Strategy for Digital for Digital Skills<sup>5</sup> and the Operational Plan both adopted in 2020<sup>6</sup>.

The National Strategy explicitly mentions older people among the target groups at highest risk of exclusion from the digitalisation process. In Chapter 4 – on citizens’ digital skills – 3 priorities are presented: 1. Internet access of the working-age population with low or no digital skills and low educational level; 2. digital literacy of the working-age population already using the Internet; 3. digital inclusion/access of older people, women not in employment or in particular conditions, immigrants, people with disabilities and disadvantaged groups in general, with low educational level. In order to achieve these goals, specific lines of interventions are envisaged: Training courses for adults in ordinary educational institutions; training courses in informal educational institutions (such as, e-learning opportunities); improvement of digital skills at local level involving local institutions and stakeholders (such as libraries, associations and community centres); communication and awareness-raising activities; digital inclusion measures. This latter line of intervention specifically refers to social groups at risk of digital exclusion, such as older people. In this respect, the National Strategy suggests the adoption of measures dedicated to disadvantaged social groups such as older people, people with a low education or income, people with disabilities,

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<sup>4</sup> Agenzia per l'Italia Digitale e il Dipartimento per la Trasformazione Digitale (2021), “[Piano Triennale per l'informatica della Pubblica Amministrazione. Aggiornamento 2021-2023](#)”, ottobre 2021.

<sup>5</sup> Ministro per l'Innovazione Tecnologica e la Digitalizzazione (2020), “[Strategia Nazionale per le Competenze Digitali](#)”, 21 July 2020.

<sup>6</sup> Repubblica Digitale (2020), “[Strategia Nazionale per le Competenze Digitali. Piano Operativo](#)”, 23 dicembre 2020.

also through the widely available and easy-to-use tools such as radio and television, and specific digital facilitation interventions.

Axis IV of the Operational Plan is aimed at implementing the National Strategy's priorities reported above and it focuses specifically on citizens' digital competences, envisaging national measure aimed at: enhancing and replicating initiatives and practices that have proven to work; coping with the digital divide of social groups at risk of digital exclusion (older people, women not in employment or in particular conditions, immigrants, people with disabilities and disadvantaged groups in general, with low educational level) with the direct involvement of local actors and stakeholders (such as public libraries and the education system); integrating the support that can be provided by local stakeholders and the national information system (i.e. radio and TV); adopting a multi-level governance system. These measures must be specifically destined at increasing digital competences of people who are not able to use smartphone applications and Internet: even if the Operational Plan does not specifically mention the social target groups, these are defined by the National Strategy; in this context, the skills in using smartphones and Internet are used as an indicator of digital competences.

### **1.3 National recovery and resilience plans covering the digitalisation of public services**

The National Recovery and Resilience Plan (*Piano Nazionale di Ripresa e Resilienza - PNRR*<sup>7</sup>), was presented by the Italian Government on 30 April 2021, and approved by the EU on 13 July 2021. The Plan does not specifically refer to the risk of digital exclusion of specific groups, such as older people. As far as the digitalisation is concerned, three lines of action and funding are foreseen. EUR 1.25 million are destined to digital infrastructure and cyber security; EUR 1.13 million are destined to data interoperability; EUR 5.57 million are destined to digital citizenship, services and platforms. This latter line of action is aimed at developing digital services to be provided to citizens and private companies to directly communicate and obtain provisions from the public administration.

## **2 Programmes and practices aimed at ensuring equal access to public services in the digital age**

Digital Republic (*Repubblica Digitale*)

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<sup>7</sup> Italian Government (2021), "[Piano Nazionale di Ripresa e Resilienza – PNRR](#)", July 2021.

Digital Republic<sup>8</sup> is the national strategic initiative that aims to combat the cultural digital divide in the Italian population, support maximum digital inclusion, and foster education on the technologies of the future. Fundamental to the achievement of this objective is the activity of the National Coalition for Digital Competences, composed of public and private entities that adhere to the Manifesto for the Digital Republic, proposing concrete actions capable of producing measurable and quantifiable results. As of 2021, 200 organisations pertaining to the public sector, the private sector, as well as civil-society organisations are involved in the Digital Republic's initiatives and projects. The projects promoted under the Digital Republic initiative target different groups of subjects potentially excluded from the digitalisation process, including older people. For instance, the project "Becoming a digital citizen"<sup>9</sup> – promoted by "Fondazione Leonardo" and the Italian Carabinieri – is aimed at enhancing digital competences of older people living in small Italian villages. The initiative involved 72 older people living in small towns and develops training courses that can be customised according to needs, with skills that can include both a technical-operational part (e.g. the ability to navigate online) and a more 'critical' part (e.g. knowing how to assess the reliability of a source or knowing the appropriate communication register for a social environment). The lessons take place in presence, in Carabinieri's headquarters selected throughout the country - in municipalities with less than eight thousand inhabitants - and will be conducted by Leonardo personnel. Each participant will receive a handbook and the classrooms will be equipped with the computer tools needed to conduct the courses (smartphones, tablets, PCs and portable routers).

### Digital Civil Service (*Servizio Civile Digitale*)

The Digital Civil Service<sup>10</sup> is a branch of the ordinary National Civil Service – existing in Italy since 2001 – introduced in December 2021 to finance initiatives aimed at overcoming the digital divide and at producing a positive impact on local communities. Projects financed in the framework of the Digital Civil Service – which will count on the work of young people who decided to apply to the public calls of the Digital Civil Service launched in January 2022 – are aimed at enhancing digital competences of people at risk of being excluded from the digitalization process and consequently from the access to digital public services. 45 projects were selected by the Ministry of Technological Innovation and Digital Transition: for instance, the civil-society organisation ANCoS proposed a 12-month project named "Elders and digital transition: volunteering for change" (*Anziani e transizione digitale: volontari al servizio del cambiamento*)<sup>11</sup>. The project has three

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<sup>8</sup> More information on the initiative and the projects financed in its framework is available on the [official website](#) of Digital Republic.

<sup>9</sup> Leonardo S.p.A. e Arma dei Carabinieri (2021), "[Formazione anziani all'uso del digitale - Diventare Cittadino Digitale](#)", June 2021.

<sup>10</sup> More information on the initiative and the projects financed in its framework is available on the [official website](#) of the Digital Civil Service.

<sup>11</sup> Information on this project is available at the [website](#) of the civil-society organisation ANCoS.

core goals: Strengthening people's digital skills, without discrimination of any kind, starting with the youngest (digital civil service volunteers) and then addressing - in stages older people, through peer education strategies; Ensuring ethical, responsible and non-discriminatory technological development; Train and support citizens (especially frail older persons) so that they can access present and future services and opportunities through a process of continuous training. The "digital facilitation" service, which is the focus of the project, involves 11 civil service volunteers in digital support, training and information and education activities addressed to older people over 60, especially frail and at risk of social exclusion due to economic, cultural, physical and geographical conditions that limit their access to the main public and private digital services.

### **3 Research and data focused on equal access to public services in the digital age**

The National Anti-Discrimination Office of the Italian Government (UNAR) released data on episodes of discrimination registered by its contact centre: this data was transmitted to the Italian Parliament in the 2020 UNAR annual report<sup>12</sup>. In 2020, 25 episodes of discrimination on grounds of age were registered by UNAR: one of them occurred in the public space; one in the access to public services (not specified); 23 in the workplace or access to the labour market.

In 2019<sup>13</sup>, the National Statistics Institute (ISTAT) released data concerning citizens' use of technologies. Data was collected in the context of the survey on living conditions and habits of Italian families, with a sample of 24,000 families living in Italy. According to the survey, 29.1% of Internet users aged 16-74 have high technology competences. Families made exclusively of people aged 65 or more have the lowest access to broadband connection: 34% compared to families with at least one member aged less than 18 (95.1%) and to a national average of 74.7%. Age is reported to be one of the most crucial factors influencing the access and use of Internet: Internet is used by 90% of people aged 15-24; by 72.4% of people aged 55-59; and by 41.9% of people aged 65-74. This latter figure is however on the rise compared to the previous year. Moreover, older people – differently from the younger generations – generally do not combine smartphones and PCs and use the Internet mostly through their PCs. As per digital skills, in

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<sup>12</sup> UNAR (2020), [Relazione al Parlamento sull'attività svolta e sull'effettiva applicazione del principio di parità di trattamento e sull'efficacia dei meccanismi di tutela](#), 2020.

<sup>13</sup> ISTAT (2019), "[Cittadini e ICT](#)", anno 2019.

2019, 29.1 per cent of Internet users aged 16-74 have high digital skills. The majority of Internet users, on the other hand, have low (41.6%) or basic (25.8%) skills. Furthermore, there is a niche of Internet users who have no digital skills at all (3.4%, or 1.135 million). Age remains an important but not decisive factor: 20–24-year-olds have advanced levels of skills in 45.1% of cases; people aged 65-74 mostly have low (57.4%) or basic (23.5%) digital skills. Another discriminating factor is the level of education, although slightly more than half of the graduates who use the Web have high digital skills (52.3%).

In 2021, the civil-society organisation “50&più” and Fondazione Leonardo released a publication titled “Hypotesis for the future of the Elders”<sup>14</sup>, summarising and analysing the results of a survey conducted on a sample of 1,500 people aged 50-85 living in Italy. According to the study, the sample showed an intense use of technologies: 85% has a smartphone, more than 61% has a PC, 21% a tablet. 72% of the respondents uses PC and tablet for email services; 67.8% to surf the Internet; 67% for social networks. The study has a specific focus on the use of digital health services: 73% of the participants reported using technological devices to get in contact with the GP or other professionals.

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<sup>14</sup> Sangalli, C., Trabucchi, M. [Ed] (2021), Ipotesi per il futuro degli anziani. Tecnologie per l'autonomia, la salute e le connessioni sociali, Il Mulino, 2021.



## 4 State of digitalisation of selected public services

		Selected public services relevant for older persons			
		Access to health records	Public statutory pensions	Social benefits	Other (as relevant in your context)
<b>Stage of digitalisation</b>	Not digitalised (Y/N)	N (The Italian DPA specified <sup>15</sup> that general practitioners – and health professionals in general – can have access to their patients’ electronic health files once their consent is provided. They can also therefore help older patients to access it)	N	N	
	Information is available online (Y/N)	Y	Y	Y	
	Transactions are possible online (Y/N)	Y	Y	Y	
<b>Recognition of groups at risk of digital exclusion</b>	Service specific regulation recognises barriers to digital inclusion / vulnerable and disadvantaged groups (Y/N).	Y	Y	Y	
	<b>If yes</b> , please list the barriers and groups that are mentioned.	The possibility exists to delegate the access to online health records for those who cannot	The National Social Security Institute (INPS) has introduced an online service called “Digital	The possibility exists to delegate the access to the online individual INPS services for those users who cannot	

<sup>15</sup> Garante per la Protezione dei Dati Personali (2020), [FAQ sul Fascicolo Sanitario Elettronico \(FSE\)](#), last updated in September 2020.

		autonomously use the electronic health file ( <i>Fascicolo Sanitario Elettronico</i> – FSE). The categories of users who might opt for this possibility are not specified; however, they might include older people, children and adolescents aged less than 18. Information on the procedure available at: <a href="https://support.fascicolo-sanitario.it/guida/profilo/deghe-accesso-fse">https://support.fascicolo-sanitario.it/guida/profilo/deghe-accesso-fse</a>	Pension Consultant”, a virtual counselling service providing information to older people on the services they can benefit from through their pension regime. Information available at: <a href="https://www.inps.it/inps-comunica/inps-inclusione-e-innovazione/i-progetti-per-i-cittadini/pensioni">https://www.inps.it/inps-comunica/inps-inclusione-e-innovazione/i-progetti-per-i-cittadini/pensioni</a>	autonomously use them. This possibility also extends to the pension services and any other services provided by the Institute. More information available at: <a href="https://www.inps.it/prestazioni-servizi/delega-dellidentita-digitale-per-accedere-ai-servizi-online">https://www.inps.it/prestazioni-servizi/delega-dellidentita-digitale-per-accedere-ai-servizi-online</a>	
<b>Multichannel access options</b>	<b>Telephone service (Y/N)</b> If yes, please describe what kind of personalised services it provides.	Y Each local and regional health department has a phone service that can be called to obtain information on the use of services, including the FSE.	Y INPS has its local phone services people can call to ask questions on the functioning of the procedures.	Y INPS has its local phone services people can call to ask questions on the functioning of the procedures.	
	<b>Physical administrative access points (Y/N).</b> If yes, please specify the level of availability (local, regional, national), the opening days and hours.	Y Local health departments available in each town or in more than one area of bigger cities. Opening days and hours vary depending on the specific department.	Y INPS has its offices located in each city (more than one office in bigger cities) where people can book an appointment and ask questions concerning the functioning of the procedures. Opening days and hours vary depending on the specific office.	Y INPS has its offices located in each city (more than one office in bigger cities) where people can book an appointment and ask questions concerning the functioning of the procedures. Opening days and hours vary depending on the specific office.	

	<p><b>Specific locations</b> that facilitate <b>offline</b> access to the service (Y/N)  <b>If yes</b>, indicate the location(s). Please describe what kind of support is provided.</p>	N	N	N	
	<p><b>Specific locations</b> that facilitate <b>online</b> access to the service (Y/N).  <b>If yes</b>, indicate the location(s). Please describe what kind of support is provided.</p>	N	N	N	
	<p><b>Other</b> – please indicate any other access channels to the service.</p>				
<p><b>Other forms of support for online use</b></p>	<p>Please indicate any other <b>form of support to facilitate the use of the online service</b> for older persons such as easy-to-read versions, different language versions, etc.</p>	N	N	N	